



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

Media Contact:
nnlb.communications@gmail.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 31, 2023

Navajo Nation leaders advocate for the protection of ICWA laws in the state of Utah



SALT LAKE CITY, UT – On Tuesday, members of the 25th Navajo Nation Council and Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren met with Utah Lt. Governor Deidre Henderson and state legislators to advocate for House Bill 40, sponsored by State Rep. Christine Watkins (R-Price), which seeks to codify provisions of the federal Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) in the state of Utah. Last week, the House Judiciary Committee voted to hold the bill from advancing to a floor vote.

In 1978, Congress enacted ICWA to protect the best interest of Native American children and to promote the stability and security of tribal nations and families through the establishment of federal standards for

the removal of children and placement in homes that will reflect the unique values of Native American culture. The federal ICWA law was challenged in a Texas district court in 2015 leading to the *Haaland v. Brackeen* case, which is currently before the U.S. Supreme Court awaiting final ruling. If H.B. 40 is approved by the State Legislature and signed into law, the state would become the eleventh to do so.

Navajo Nation Council Speaker Crystalyne Curley was joined by Council Delegates Curtis Yanito, Germaine Simonson, Eugenia Charles-Newton, Carl Slater, Shaandiin Parrish, and Rickie Nez along with community advocates and state officials in voicing their support for the legislative bill.

“As a mother, we are doing this for the protection and livelihood of our children and families. The creation of a state ICWA law will counter the potential impacts if the Supreme Court overturns the law at the federal level. I commend my colleagues of the 25th Navajo Nation Council, President Nygren, Utah Navajo Commission, and many others who continue to meet with legislators to move H.B. 40 forward. We are requesting that Utah lawmakers enact a state ICWA law that mirrors the federal ICWA laws to protect the inherent rights of our people,” said Speaker Curley.

The Council members also came together with other Utah tribal leaders including Ute Mountain Ute Tribe Chairman Manuel Heart, Paiute Tribe of Indians Chairwoman Corrina Bow, and Confederate Tribes of the Goshute Council member Hope Jackson, for a press conference at the Utah Capitol to speak about the importance of H.B. 40.

“The Navajo Nation worked with the state of Utah to draft, review, and discuss the Utah ICWA House Bill 40 to ensure that the best interest of the state Utah, the Navajo Nation, Navajo children and families is honored and recognized,” stated Delegate Charles-Newton, who also noted that the bill is supported by many top Utah leaders, attorneys, judges, and others.

“This bill doesn’t do anything different than what the state has done for decades. Our judges and child welfare advocates know the systems and this bill would align those systems together. This is not a racial issue. This is about being a citizen of the Navajo Nation, of the Ute Mountain Ute, of the Confederated Tribes of the Goshute, Shoshone-Paiute, all of the wonderful tribes that make up this state. It’s a nation to nation, a state to state relationship, affirmed in our constitution. It’s not an equal protection issue. I’m a citizen of the Navajo Nation. Our babies are citizens of the Navajo Nation and you have an opportunity to make sure they know who they are, that they’re protected, and that they’ll live long and beautiful lives. So, I ask the members of the legislature to move this bill forward,” said Delegate Slater.

On Monday, Council Delegates Curtis Yanito, Eugenia Charles-Newton, and Rickie Nez also met with several key Utah State House and Senate members, to request key lawmakers to move H.B. 40 forward to uphold the sovereign rights of the eight tribal nations within the state of Utah who rely on ICWA for the protection of Native American children and families. The Council will continue to meet with legislators to advance the bill.

#

For the latest news from the Navajo Nation Council, please visit <https://www.navajonationcouncil.org> or search for “Navajo Nation Council” on social media